

TENANTS' NEWS

TENANTS' UNION OF NSW
CO-OP LTD
68 Bettington St.
Point 2000
(2) 7

N.S.W.

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UNITY IS POWERFUL

Tenants, with their just needs for fair leases and for affordable and secure housing are still losing badly.

The Tenants' Union is fighting for law reform and for much more public housing. The Tenants' Union is the vital lobbying organisation. To do better we need **members**; we need voices. Numbers and noise are necessary, so encourage tenants to join the Union. New membership forms are being distributed now through Tenants' Advice Services and other housing organizations.

TENANTS' UNION RESOURCING UNIT NEWS

Current staff at the Tenants' Union are Project Officers:

- Mary Perkins
- Frances Press
- Kerry Dent
- Mary-Anne Veliscek
(grant-in-aid)

The Grant-in-Aid position is very exciting. Mary-Anne has been employed for 3 years to work on tenancy issues affecting migrants. In addition to encouraging bi-lingual workers and volunteers to give tenancy advice, Mary-Anne will be looking thoroughly at the ways migrants can be informed of their rights, uncovering their particular difficulties and developing new and appropriate teaching materials to assist migrants. Mary-Anne is especially going to get stuck into discrimination issues. Mary-Anne's work will be more than useful in the fight for a fairer and better deal on housing.

TENANTS' UNION BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Tenants' Union Board is aging close to the 30 years mark. More young people than any other age group are affected by tenancy.

If any young people are interested in influencing Union affairs please contact the Union Office Director. Vacancies occur every so often and we would like some

keen youth to participate. We really would like to hear from any member who wants to meet to discuss tenancy policy matters and who can help with decision making and action.

LAW REFORM? EVER?

Soon we are supposed to see the Government's proposals and everybody should have six months to work out their opinions.

If the process turns out as expected, the Tenants' Union with others will run around for the first three months publicising the package so as to gauge community response.

For the remaining three months it is hoped groups will be putting their own submissions to the Government at the same time as the Tenants' Union does.

Remember the consumer's law proposals? It was three years that **Reforming a Feudal Law** was published.

The Australian Consumers Association are currently reprinting **Feudal Law**. Contact the Tenants' Union office in the next few weeks or ACA (02 5580099) if you would like to purchase a copy. Sorry, we don't know how much it will cost yet.

Reforming a Feudal Law will be interesting comparative reading to help for your own opinions about Reform Proposals.

NATIONAL YOUTH HOUSING CONFERENCE 1985

Are the Young Ever Tenants?

To be answered at this conference in Wollongong on August 25 and 26. For further information contact Ros Gibbons, Illawarra Youth Housing Ltd (042) 297325

THE STATE OF PRIVATE RENTAL ACCOMMODATION SUPPLY AND DEMAND

A conference was held in Sydney on 28 June 1985, entitled "Private Rental Housing, Availability, Affordability, and Access". The conference was jointly hosted by Mr F Walker, Minister for Housing and Mr G Paciullo, Minister for Consumer Affairs.

The participants were invited from industry, owners, tenants and Government. The purpose of the conference was to gauge impending effect of taxation changes on private rental housing.

The recent report by Mr Chris Paris commissioned by a Consultative Committee (including Tenants' Union) was launched. The report is called **Private Renting: Public Issues** "The Economic and Other Factors Affecting the Availability of Private Rental Accommodation in NSW". This report dramatically uncovers the extent and nature of tenants poverty and the way this situation has occurred without consumer protection ie, tenancy law reform.

After Mr Paris spoke on his report, many panel speakers described life in the private rental crisis. Ms Betty Harding uncovered the growth and use of substantial and overcrowded accommodation. The **Sydney Morning Herald** Pg.3 - 29.6.85 relayed Ms Harding's outline in their article "Out go chickens, in move people - at \$50 a week to rent a shed". In some areas it's "chook sheds", in other areas it's old stables. "The Rental Crisis, Who Pays?". We all know the answer.

On the topic of "Standards and Rights in Private Rental Housing", Mr Chris Scott (R.E.J.) put forward the investor's perspective and Ms Frances Press (T.U.) put forward the tenants' view. Frances' paper was very powerful and stressed the need for law reform embodying security of tenure and rent regulation. Frances was so persuasive that subsequent speakers also mentioned the law reform and this need and the benefits seemed to have been accepted by the audience.

Mr Rob Carter, Economist and Advisor to the Victorian Minister for Housing talked to his paper "Housing Options and the Future Role of Private Rental Housing". Mr Carter pointed out that it seems private rental housing will be important for at least another two decades but how many more kinds of public rental housing are needed ie, community and local Government rental and common-equity rental co-operatives.

Following lunch, Mr Walker chaired the last session on supply issues and Private Rental Housing.

Mr David Wilmoth (D.E.P.) pointed out that many Government regulations limit the kinds of accommodation which can be constructed.

Mr G Brew, Director Medium Density Housing Lend Lease NSW explained how the bottom has fallen out of investment housing and described what changes need to be implemented in commercial and industrial buildings in Australia attracts a 4% depreciation allowance and this concession is not available for residential

investment. Mr Brew also described some U.S. programs to produce more low-cost rental stock.

Mr Michael Eyers, General Council Consultants, looked at housing finance especially as the Australian financial system is being deregulated.

Nothing particularly clear came out of the conference except that the proposed change to the Tax System could detrimentally affect private rental supply. The issue of exactly what needs to be done, to satisfy consumer's tenants needs has just begun to be aired.

All the papers and the report **Private Renting: Public Issues** are available at the Tenants' Union Office.

CHANGES AFFECTING NSW TENANCY

METROPOLITAN, WATER SEWERAGE AND DRAINAGE BOARD - LOWERING OF EXCESS WATER THRESHOLD

From 1 July 1985 the MWS&DB is phasing in a new threshold for excess water usage. Prior to 1 July 1985, the excess threshold was 227 klitres.

From 1 July 1985 the new excess threshold of 200 klitres will apply. Charges for usage over the 200 klitre threshold will be 36c per klitre up to 500 klitre and 44c per klitre thereafter.

An average Sydney household uses 312 klitres per year and excess water bill would then be \$40.32 (112 x 36c).

Average Wollongong consumption equals 281 klitres and excess water bill would equal \$29.16 (81 x 36c).

The real effect of these changes will not be until after 1 July 1986. The meters will be read after 1 July 1985 and then re-read after 1 July 1986 and the excess charge levied. There could be difficulties for tenants who lease properties mid-way between meter readings as the new tenants could have to pay for part of the previous tenants usage.

At this stage it appears the only way that this could be avoided is where the owner asks for a special meter reading at the commencement of a lease and averages and estimates the excess the departing tenant may incur. The departing tenant could then be required to pay that estimate with the new tenant starting afresh.

Our advice to tenants at this stage then is if you lease a property after 1 July 1985, read your meter with an independent witness, before you move in. Approach your owner asking for his or her decision on how they will treat water bills and point out that you regard yourself as only being responsible for excess you incur.

IMPENDING CHANGES ON THE CREATION OF PROTECTED TENANCIES

Mr George Paciullo has issued a press release (mid June) describing "The Advantages of Changing Protected Tenancies Legislation" so no new protected tenants can be created. Advantages to whom?

Why did the Government concede this to the real estate industry and to property owners now?.

How we hope new law give all tenants security of tenure and redress for excessive rent increases.

This is your last chance to check if you are protected tenant or not. Go visit a legal or tenants' advice service for discovery guidance.

DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS

Following a review of the Departments functioning in 1984, the Department has been restructured so hopefully the Department will serve consumers better and by accounts this has commenced. Changes are already evident. The Rental Advisory Service has finally produced leaflets. The need for consumer information services has been recognised so optimistically, we will see some Rental Bond Board interest funds going to Tenants Advice Services.

The Department's motto is "Your protection is the bottom line". Their record on tenancy must be embarrassing for them to say the least.

The Department can only improve and because the NSW tenancy situation is shocking, action had better be relevant and rapid.

COUNCIL OF AUCTIONEERS AND AGENTS

This Council is a statutory body attached to the Department of Consumer Affairs. Members are elected every three years to administer regulations about the real estate industry.

Although the Tenants' Union has requested consumer representation of this Council in the past there have been no changes in the Council's constituency.

Keep an eye of these matters. The Council is not active regulating real estate agents, these issues must be taken up.

DATA BANKS AGAINST TENANCY

The spectre of Credit Reference Association records being used against tenants seeking accommodation has far from diminished.

The Tenants' Union has completed a policy submission to the NSW Privacy Committee and the recommendations were:

1. That the Privacy Committee continues to reject the concept of a computer based information service on tenants.
2. That the Privacy Committee communicates its stance to the Government in the form of a legislative proposal submitted to Attorney General's Department.
3. That NSW and particular the Attorney General's Department undertake the necessary legislative steps to ensure that such a service cannot operate.

From the **National Times** (Page 9 - 19.4.85) "Privacy watchdog bites deeper" we read:

Ordinary democratic rights are easily subverted as data banks grow, according to Nolan. In the United States, for instance, there is a growth of tenancy data banks which theoretically could condemn people who have had a row with a landlord to homelessness. "The onus of proof is reversed. Information goes into the system and you have got to rely on your rights after the fact", Nolan said.

(Mr Jim Nolan is the NSW Privacy Committees Executive Member)

FOR SALE
T-SHIRTS



The Tenants' Union has T-shirts available in 5 colour combinations to suit all complexions. The T-shirts costs:

- \$ 8 for pensioners, unemployed etc
- \$10 for part-time workers
- \$12 for workers

NEWS FROM TENANTS ADVICE SERVICES

The big news is the obvious. There is no news yet on real funding for Tenants Advice Services, and most services report many people in their districts are looking and looking for accommodation, looking for housing they can afford, and looking for an agent who doesn't discriminate.

UP NORTH

Newcastle 049-6922746 is documenting the changes for tenants as a result of the Hunter Water Board's pricing policy. Hunter tenants usually have to pay for entire water usage. This report will be available in two months.

Armidale 067-721268 has greatest demand for their services at the beginning of the year. They are staying low-key until funded (one day) and then will promote their service.

Woodburn 066-822272 and **Lismore** 066-213199 face housing shortages. **Lismore** has started a share accommodation register which is working well. Having some success combating scoundrel agents.

Gosford 043-244244 receives many enquiries from single men for help and emergency housing demand is increasing as rents are very expensive.


OUT WEST-ISH

Katoomba 047-821117 since March have had a full-time tenancy position funded by YACS. Katoomba is very involved with workshops in schools as part of a legal education programme and with the community groups seeking to have an independent legal centre funded in that area.

Wagga Wagga 069-211441 say their women and dependants if they have any have tremendous housing difficulty and in dealing with real estates.

Albury 060-216366 are very conscious that publicity is important in highlighting their service and their communities problems. "The Border Morning Mail" has been carrying many stories lately on the housing shortage and many families' plight in this regard.

SHELTER OR THE STREETS



HOUSING PROBLEMS?

Illawarra Youth Housing Limited. Ph. 271166

Housing Information Service. Ph. 271166

FOR ADVICE AND SUPPORT

Wollongong Youth Refuge. Ph. 281946

Wollongong Out Of Workers Union. Ph. 280636

Wollongong CYSS Ph. 283074

CONTACT:

Youth and Housing Project, Friends of the Illawarra Community Housing Trust Ltd.

HOUSING PROBLEMS?



FOR ADVICE AND SUPPORT

Posters by Redback Graphix.

DOWN SOUTH-ISH

Wollongong 042-271166 also is very aware of seeking out those in difficulty, helping and educating. Wollongong has received Board of Adult Education funds tenancy talks in Wollongong, Shellharbour and Kiama local Government areas and these talks, like the Tenants' Union previously, are particularly for migrants in their native language. The service has a brochure which is also available in 12 community language, posters and leaflets for letterbox distribution. The service will be advertised on the regional commercial TV in the next month and if there is any spare cash, later this year the service will advertise through the cinemas.

Client load is heavy with main difficulties faced by young people searching for housing.

Queanbeyan 066-977099 residents are facing dramatic rent increases such as \$10 - \$15 per week. **Queanbeyan** have stickers available for 5c or 10c each to anyone. These are printed in red on white paper and read "These premises are protected by the Tenants' Union". They are very effective. **Queanbeyan** will be at the housing display in Canberra on 3 to 21 July and they are contributing to a booklet for homeless people in Canberra/Queanbeyan. Contact for the booklet is PO Box 410 Civic Square ACT 2608.

Shoalhaven 044-214522 report on spate of evictions and evidence of a general lack of rights and obligations. **Shoalhaven** has a weekly column in the "South Coast Register" entitled "Help with Housing". Their brochure is widely distributed and the service receives many referrals from every source.

Fairfield 02-727433 are having some success containing renegade and rascal real estate agents. They have had these problems for years. **Fairfield** have no funds for publicity. In any case demand for their help is excessive. In 10 months from July to April this year they received about 1500 tenancy related enquiries.

Bankstown 02-703093 have CEP workers from March to end of November. They are producing for their local Government area "A Renter's Survival Manual" and an accommodation directory. In conjunction with the Tenants' Union Grant-in-Aid they are pursuing migrant tenancy education and trying to get educative articles in the "Bankstown Express". They have already produced a poster.

Liverpool 02-6007287 also have CEP workers for most of this year. They are producing an accommodation index in leaflet form for specific categories of people eg women with children, women without kids, men, youth etc. They are also collating an accommodation survival kit for their area including refuges etc in nearby localities.

Eastwood 02-8583222 say many people coming to them who pay too much rent and are forced to live in unsuitable accommodation. The tenancy conflict so prevalent in the past is now replaced by pressing problems.

Sutherland 02-5218487 are presently working with other groups to get a youth refuge in their area as the St Vincent de Paul refuge closed about 2 months ago.

Manly 02-9971066 report lack of available accommodation across the cost spectrum. Elderly single people particularly face difficulty. There is virtually no affordable housing. Boarding house rooms are around \$60 per week with no food. They feature in occasional articles in the "Manly Daily".

Inner City Info Van 02-8100617 have had to suspend their service from 1 July until the State Budget is handed down as their funds have expired.

Other Inner City Services report great demand for all kinds of housing help.

Hillsdale 02-6941102 have many enquiries from migrants with large families and DSS recipients as they faced discrimination attempting to get housing.

Bondi 02-3091607 receives constant requests from people searching for accommodation. Often this is due to evictions because of rent arrears. Many so affected are faced to camp in friend's lounge rooms. Repair problems are frequent enquiries from those managing to meet the high rents. Agents discriminate particularly against the unemployed.

Redfern 02-6992260 are finding every other tenancy call is a repairs problem. These calls are interspersed with bond disputes, share accommodation difficulties and some grotesque rent increases up to \$20 per week. These problems are very stressful as it is easier for an owner to find tenants than it is for tenants to find housing. Much work needs to be done in the education area and in the near future they would like to educate tenants, particularly Aboriginal people who are so vulnerable.

Redfern - The Union Office report that there was a success limiting evictions on a property in Rosebay which has been acquired by the Department of Environment and Planning. The Department was requiring vacant possession as it purchased the property. Their Minister Mr Carr, intervened to alter that condition. Unfortunately, this has not, we are told established any precedent.

In Camperdown, the Royal Prince Alfred owns approximately 200 houses. About 30 have recently been demolished for car parking. As the remaining properties have been declared surplus to the hospital's activities they are to be sold off. About 60 houses are to go immediately, with promises that those housed will be relocated into other hospital-owned surplus, insecure and dilapidated stock. The residents are organised and the contact is Leon Parissi 02-6098922 Ext 245.

In George Street Redfern the Public Art Squad is painting a mural about peace and the Global Community. The wall in question belongs to a rooming house where there are about 20 rooms let at \$40 per week rent. The proprietor has requested the artists to insert "Flats to Let". The artists politely declined because words in the mural "are outside the funding guidelines".

Redfern Legal Centre 02-6987277 have just established a tenancy unit and Julie Huber co-ordinates law student assistants and six volunteer solicitors. They can only do casework for their area, South Sydney, but will be working on policy with other groups. Some of the work that they will do will be of interest to others eg, if they take up some town planning and development issues with groups of tenants.

Membership No.....



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